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THEY could be one of the more unlikely duos ever to work on a book together. Nor did they seem a likely pair for collaborating on a a documentary. But Shelley Geballe and Janice Gruendel did both.

With Dr. Warren Andiman, they edited "Forgotten Children of the AIDS Epidemic" (Yale University Press, 1995). And they produced the video, also about AIDS orphans, "Mommy, Who'll Take Care of Me?" in conjunction with Connecticut Public Television. It was broadcast in the state in February and will be broadcast nationally this spring.

The odd thing is that until recently the two were battling over services provided to children in the state.

In 1989 Ms. Gruendel was the deputy commissioner for program services at what was then called the Department of Children and Youth Services; Ms. Geballe was associate legal director of the Connecticut Civil Liberties Union Foundation, which had sued the department. The lawsuit, Juan F. v. O'Neill, was brought by Martha Stone, director of the C.C.L.U., and Ms. Geballe.

Over a period of several months, Ms. Geballe and Ms. Gruendel, along with other officials, talked about how the department and services for children could be improved.

It wasn't the last time they would face off. In 1991 Ms. Gruendel became the director of health services for the Department of Corrections. This time she had to implement a consent judgment won earlier by Ms. Geballe and the Civil Liberties Union that demanded better care for inmates infected with H.I.V.

Ms. Geballe left her job with the C.C.L.U. in 1991, and Ms. Gruendel left state government the following year. But the two had learned to respect each other. "We could see that both of us were interested in what served the best interests of children," Ms. Geballe said. "What struck me about her was she was totally honest. It was so refreshing to have someone in that position take the risks that entailed."

Away from their old jobs, Ms. Geballe and Ms. Gruendel found they had a great deal in common. Both had seen how AIDS ravaged communities and particularly the children left behind by parents dying of the disease; both had worked to alleviate that suffering. They even found that personally they weren't too far apart. Both are married and mothers of three sons; they live in the same town and have the same living room rugs.

They decided to put together a documentary about children living through the AIDS epidemic. With Ms. Gruendel working in educational video production and Ms. Geballe enrolled in a

master's program on public health at the Yale University School of Medicine, they had the background, knowledge and expertise for the project.

They interviewed experts in the field, spent time with families living through the crisis and began to realize they had more than a documentary. So, together with Dr. Andiman, who heads the Pediatric AIDS Clinic at Yale-New Haven Hospital, they edited "Forgotten Children of the AIDS Epidemic."

"We felt more attention had to be paid to this issue, to these children," Dr. Andiman said. "We are going to continue to see an increasing pool of AIDS orphans and certainly these kids are going to need psychotherapeutic support. They are living through a very traumatic experience and these kids are also stigmatized."

Ms. Geballe and Ms. Gruendel said the work was difficult at times. Some of the women they interviewed have since died; some of the grandmothers they talked to have lost another child to AIDS and continue to struggle to care for their grandchildren.

In the preface of the book the authors note that when they showed portions of the book to Representative Rosa DeLauro she said, "You know, these kids aren't even on the radar screen."

The book includes articles written by medical and legal experts and social workers as well as commentary from families living through the disease and from children who have lost their parents. "The book alone can't change things, nor can a one-hour documentary, but together they can raise consciousness and encourage people to become involved," Ms. Gruendel said.

The two women recently met with Congressional leaders in Washington, D.C., to push for an agenda spelled out in the book. The strongest message, they said, comes from the grandmothers.

"When I lost my daughter-in-law, that was the hardest, 'cause the little children were there," one is quoted as saying. "It was eight little kids. So it was a lot of responsibility on me. They didn't understand what was happening to their mother. They didn't take her death very easily in the beginning. They got counseling and they're doing better now in school. They're beautiful children."

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